



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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MAY 07 2010

Ref: 8EPR-N

Craig Bobzien
Forest Supervisor
Black Hills National Forest
1019 N 5th Street
Custer, SD 57730

RE: Black Hills National Forest Travel
Management Plan, Final Environmental
Impact Statement and Record of Decision.
CEQ# 20100122

Dear Mr. Bobzien:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 8 has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) Travel Management Plan in accordance with EPA's responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609. As presented in the Final EIS and ROD, the project area comprises approximately 1.2 million acres of Federal lands in western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming.

EPA previously provided comments on the Draft EIS on May 18, 2009. EPA's review of the Final EIS and ROD for this project found both documents to be generally responsive to our comments regarding impacts to water quality, aquatic resources, and wildlife habitat from new road construction associated with the Travel Management Plan. The Final EIS also addressed EPA's concerns about impacts to streams from Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs).

Selected Alternative

In our comments on the Draft EIS, EPA recommended selection of Alternative D after identifying it as the environmentally preferable alternative. In the ROD, BHNF selected "Alternative B, as Modified." Alternative B has been modified from the Draft EIS to correct data errors, but the intent of this alternative is the same as the original proposed action on which the public was asked to comment. The BHNF has determined that this alternative would meet most

National Forest Advisory Board recommendations to provide an active (i.e., designed) travel system while protecting resources and reducing conflicts with other users. It would provide 3,466 miles of roads including 2,226 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; increase motorized trails to 663 miles; and limit cross-country motorized use to 179,000 acres only for the purposes of game retrieval, elk only, or dispersed camping. According to the Final EIS, the motor vehicle use map would make user compliance and law enforcement easier, reduce resource damage and conflicts with non-motorized recreationists, and provide motorized users with a planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

EPA appreciates that the selected alternative will reduce impacts associated with cross-country travel. According to the ROD, page 7, "The Forest will be closed to unrestricted motorized cross-country vehicle travel unless specifically designated as open."

Noise Impacts

EPA remains concerned regarding the 96dB(A) sound emission limit for OHVs in the proposed Draft EIS and selected in the Final EIS and ROD. As noted in our Draft EIS comment letter, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has determined that noise levels above 85 dB(A) can cause hearing injury, and the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) considers noise levels above 75 dB(A), or any increase of 30 dB(A) or more above existing noise levels, a severe noise impact. EPA continues to recommend that the Forest Service consider lower legal limits for sound emissions based on recommendations by the FHWA ranging from 60 dB(A) to 70 dB(A) for recreation areas.

Enforcement Issues and Maintenance of the Transportation System

In reference to EPA's concerns with the lack of resources identified for enforcement of proposed travel restrictions and maintenance of the transportation system, BHNF indicated it is committed to using available funding to accomplish the purposes of the final decision in a targeted, efficient manner. EPA appreciates BHNF's intentions, however, unless funding is increased above current levels, it does not appear that funding for maintenance and enforcement will be sufficient for the proposed additional 2,226 miles of motorized mixed trails.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Final EIS and ROD. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments, please contact Sarah Thorston of my staff at (303) 312-6008, or you may contact me at (303) 312-6004.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda
Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation